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**Men and women at work:**

**The effects of objectification on competence, pay, and fit for the job**

**Abstract**

Although a growing interest in objectification, very few studies have examined the effects of objectification of others, in reference to both men and women. The present research is focused on the consequences of objectification in the occupational domain. The main goals were: a) investigating the effects of objectification on the perception of men's and women's competence and pay; and b) investigating the effects of objectification on the perception of men and women as suitable for high- versus low-status jobs. Results showed that objectification does not affect the perception of competence, but increases the estimated pay. For high-status jobs, the effect of objectification interacts with gender, increasing women's fit for a masculine job and decreasing men's fit for a feminine occupation. Finally, objectification increases the suitability for low-status jobs, and this is particularly true for women holding service-oriented professions. Implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** gender, objectification, occupational domain, perceived competence, experimental design.

### *The Objectification framework*

Literally, objectification refers to perceiving a person as an object. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that women are largely objectified in contemporary Western countries. When objectified, women are reduced to the status of “mere instruments” available for visual inspection, evaluation, and the pleasure of others (Bartky, 1990, p. 26). The body is seen as a sexualized object, separate from nonphysical characteristics (McKee, 2005). As a consequence of objectification, individuals learn that women’s bodies are able to represent them. This leads to the association between women’s worth and their physical appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011).

Moreover, objectification theory argues that women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The effect of this process is defined self-objectification. Since the seminal work of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), numerous papers have investigated the damaging corollary of self-objectification. Correlational studies have found relationships between self-objectification and body shame, appearance anxiety, negative and depressive affect, and various forms of disordered eating (e.g. Miner-Rubino, Twenge, & Fredrickson, 2002; Tiggeman & Kuring, 2004). Experimental research has demonstrated that heightened self-objectification promotes body shame, appearance anxiety, and hinders task performances (for a review see Moradi & Huang, 2008; Rollero, in press). However, while there is a large body of research highlighting the consequences of self-objectification very few studies examined the effects of objectification of others (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick et al., 2011; Loughnan, Haslam, Murnane, Vaes, Reynolds, & Suitner, 2010; Swami, Coles, Wilson, Salem, Wyrozumska, & Furnham, 2010). To date, these effects seem to concern mainly two different domains: the perception of humanness and the perception of competence. Concerning humanness, research showed that individuals attribute to objectified women less mind, less moral status, and less warmth (Heflick et al., 2011; Loughnan et al., 2010).

Concerning competence, Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) demonstrated that focusing on a woman's appearance leads individuals to reduce the perception of her competence.

*Men and women at work: the occupational sex bias and the gender pay gap*

Literature has largely showed that women are generally perceived less competent than men (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Feldstein, Dohm, & Crown, 2001; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). In the occupational domain, stereotypes about women's competence combine with stereotypes about women's cognitive and personality characteristics to influence the perception of the type of jobs that women are capable of doing (Alksnis, Desmarais, & Curtis, 2008; Athey & Hautaluoma, 1994; Martin, 1992; Curşeu & Boroş, 2008).

As the lack of fit model posits (Heilman, 1983; 2001), when the applicant's gender is inconsistent with that of the gender type of the job itself, the candidate will be perceived as a poor fit for the job. For example, whereas stereotypes about women portray them as lacking in those masculine qualities required for masculine job types (i.e. manager or engineer), women will be less likely to be selected for these jobs, being perceived as a misfit for masculine professions (Heilman, 2001). The lack of fit model explains the occupational sex bias, and has been shown to be related to differential treatment, toward both men and women, in selection, placement, and promotion decisions in work organizations (Pichler, Varma, & Bruce, 2010; Przygodzki-Lionet, Olivier, & Desrumaux, 2010).

It is noteworthy that jobs that require stereotypically female traits are less valued than those requiring stereotypically male characteristics (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002; Glick, 1991).

Stereotypes about women and a different evaluation of masculine and feminine jobs contribute to the gender wage gap, whereby the female-male pay difference continues to be substantial in most countries (Alksnis et al., 2008). A large body of research has studied the effect of gender on pay (i.e. Glick, 1991; Kanazawa, 2005; Lips, 2003), but to our knowledge no study has investigated the effect of objectification yet.

*Focusing on physical appearance: does it help for job-related outcomes?*

Many studies have investigated the effects of physical attractiveness on the evaluation of male and female workers (see meta-analysis by Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003). In general, attractiveness seems as important for men as for women concerning job-related outcomes (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003). However, Chiao and colleagues (Chiao, Bowman, & Gill, 2008) in their study about US Presidential election found that only for female candidates did appearance matter, and they were viewed as less competent overall.

Glick and colleagues (Glick, Larsen, Johnson, & Branstiter 2005) proposed to distinguish between physical attractiveness and sexiness. Indeed, while physical attractiveness has been shown to generate a broadly favourable impression of both men and women, investigations of the traits associated with women's sexiness suggest a stereotype that is poor match for high-status jobs. In other words, in contrast to the overall favourable effects that attractiveness has on perceived competence, the sexy woman stereotype is associated with a lack of competence-related traits, and is viewed as less suited for high-status jobs (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; Glick et al., 2005). When the role of sexiness on the evaluation of women was experimentally assessed, it was found that a sexy self-presentation harms women in high-, but not low-, status jobs (Glick et al., 2005). Focusing the attention on body appearance and promoting the perception of women as sexualized objects, objectification can have similar effects to those of sexiness, although it has not been investigated yet.

#### Present study

To summarize, when men and women are evaluated as workers, literature shows that men are generally perceived as more competent than women. Moreover, stereotypically masculine jobs are more valued than feminine jobs and this leads to differential treatments especially concerning wage.

Several studies showed that the job-related outcomes are influenced also by physical appearance. If attractiveness is as important for men as for women, sexiness seems to play a different role, harming women in high-status jobs.

All these considered, the Objectification Theory might offer a fruitful perspective to understand the occupational sex bias. Indeed, studies have demonstrated that objectification reduces the perception of women's mind and competence, but the effects of objectification on pay, and, more generally, on suitability for high versus low status jobs have not been investigated yet.

Grounded in the objectification framework, the present study aims at investigating the effects of objectification on the evaluation of male and female workers. More specifically, our main goals were: a) investigating the effects of objectification on the perception of men's and women's competence and pay; and b) investigating the effects of objectification on the perception of men and women as suitable for high- versus low-status jobs.

In particular, we hypothesized that men are generally perceived more competent than women (Hypothesis 1) (Eagly et. al., 2000; Fiske, et. al., 2002) and that objectified females, but not males, are attributed less competence than non-objectified females (Hypothesis 2) (Heflick et al., 2011). Moreover, we expected that men are attributed a higher pay than women (Hypothesis 3) (Alksnis et al., 2008), whereas no specific predictions were made regarding the role played by objectification. Concerning fit for the job, following the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983; 2001) men are expected to be more suitable for masculine jobs than for feminine jobs, vice versa we expected the contrary for women (Hypothesis 4). Since objectification does not affect the evaluation of males' competence (Heflick et al., 2011), similarly it should have no effect on the perception of men as suitable for different types of job (i.e high- versus low- status jobs) (Hypothesis 5). Finally, since objectified women are attributed less competence than non-objectified women, objectified women should be considered more suitable for low-status jobs than non-objectified women (Hypothesis 6) (Glick et al., 2005; Heflick et al., 2011).

## Method

### *Participants and Experimental Design*

A sample of 253 university students (127 male and 126 female) participated to present study.

Participants were recruited among undergraduate and graduate students of arts and science schools in Italy. Their average age was 22.86 years ( $SD = 2.38$ ). The ethnic composition of the sample was completely homogeneous: all participants were Italians. The study consisted of a 2 (Target gender: Male vs. Female) x 2 (Objectified vs. non-Objectified) between-subjects experimental design.

### *Procedure*

A photograph (5.31 in. [13.5 cm] x 7.87 in. [20.0 cm]) of a subject (target) was presented to participants. They randomly received one of the four experimental conditions: (a) picture of a non-objectified male; (b) picture of a non-objectified female; (c) picture of an objectified male; or (d) picture of an objectified female. Within gender, the person was the same in the objectified and in the non-objectified condition.

After viewing the photograph reproducing the target, participants were asked to evaluate the target's competence, his/her monthly income, and then to estimate the probability that the person in the picture had different jobs.

### *Independent Variables Manipulations*

*Target gender.* A pretest of 60 university students (34 males and 26 female; average age 22.27;  $SD = 2.13$ ) received a set of five photographs reproducing different casual dressed females and a set of five photographs reproducing different casual dressed males. Participants were asked to rate the physical attractiveness of the persons reproduced in each photograph. In order to avoid effects of attractiveness, we chose the man and the woman that had the average evaluation of attractiveness, i.e. that was rated neither beautiful nor ugly. They were then used as target subjects in the experiment. In this way, we obtained stimuli different by gender but comparable on attractiveness.



*Objectification.* Referring to the traditional conception of objectification as a focus on the body, the targets varied according to the attention they drew to the body. Following Loughnan and colleagues (2010) this was manipulated by varying the amount of skin the person in photograph displayed. In the non-objectified condition participants viewed a photograph of a casual dressed subject whereas in the objectified condition the same subject wore a swimsuit. The dimension, position, and face-ism (measure of facial prominence in the visual representation of a person) of the person was the same in all the photographs to avoid possible influences of intervenient variables.

### *Dependent measures*

*Competence.* To assess the perception of the target 's competence, participants were asked to evaluate the target on a list of five traits used in previous studies (Glick et al. 2005; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009): capable, efficient, intelligent, skilful, responsible. We asked participants to answer "How much do you think the person reproduced in the photograph is ..." using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). That set of items showed a good internal coherence (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ) and was combined in a single variable.

*Income.* Participants were asked to estimate how many euros per month earns the person reproduced in photograph.

*Job.* During the pretest, participants were also asked to rate a list of 44 jobs (22 high status and 22 low status) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (typical masculine) to 5 (typical feminine). The status of the jobs was determined by educational level and wages. Compared to low status jobs, high status professions require a university degree or are related to sensibly higher salary expectations. We used these evaluations to select the four most typical masculine jobs (2 high-status and 2 low-status) and the four most typical feminine jobs (2 high-status and 2 low-status). The selected jobs were: engineer (masculine, high-status); entrepreneur (masculine, high-status); plumber (masculine, low-status); fireman (masculine, low-status); psychologist (feminine, high-status); teacher (feminine, high-status); baby sitter (feminine, low-status); flight attendant (feminine, low-status). In

the experiment we asked participants to answer “How likely do you think the person reproduced in the photograph is a ...” then followed the list of selected jobs. Participants responded to each question using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (very much likely).

## Results

### *Competence and Income*

We performed two-way between-group ANOVAs to determine the presence of significant effects on each of the dependent variables. As predicted by hypothesis 1, target gender had a significant effect on competence,  $F(1,250) = 5.88, p < .05$ . Men ( $M = 4.19; SD = 1.08$ ) were considered more competent than women ( $M = 3.80; SD = 0.97$ ). Instead, hypothesis 2 was not confirmed, as objectification had no effect ( $F(1,250) = .56, p = .46$ ) and there was no interaction effect too ( $F(1,250) = .02, p = .88$ ).

As predicted by hypotheses 3, gender had a significant influence on the evaluation of the monthly income,  $F(1,234) = 5.08, p < .05$ . Participants estimated men ( $M = 1829.93; SD = 1246.90$ ) to earn more euros per month than women ( $M = 1536.41; SD = 842.77$ ). Also objectification influenced the estimated income,  $F(1,234) = 5.19, p < .05$ . Objectified targets ( $M = 1831.73; SD = 1211.94$ ) were considered to earn more than non-objectified ones ( $M = 1534.56; SD = 893.35$ ). No interaction effect was found ( $F(1,250) = .84, p = .36$ ).

### *Typical masculine jobs*

In Table 1 are reported the tests of the effects of independent variables on the probability that the person in photograph had the masculine jobs.

Target gender had significant main effects on all the dependent variables. As predicted by hypothesis 4, male targets were considered more suitable for all the masculine jobs (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

As predicted by hypothesis 5, objectification had no effect on the likelihood that the person in the photograph is an engineer, an entrepreneur, and a fireman. Contrary to expectations, objectification had a significant effect on the estimated probability that the target is a plumber. The objectified targets ( $M = 1.98$ ;  $SD = 1.22$ ) were considered more likely to be plumber than non-objectified targets ( $M = 1.60$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ).

An interaction effect was found on entrepreneur profession (see Figure 1). In contrast with what predicted by hypothesis 6, objectified females ( $M = 3.38$ ;  $SD = 1.76$ ) were considered more suitable for this high-status job than non-objectified females ( $M = 2.49$ ;  $SD = 1.55$ ),  $F(1,123) = 8.86$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### *Typical feminine jobs*

The tests of the effects on the probability that the person in photograph had the feminine jobs are reported in Table 3.

Target gender had significant main effects on the likelihood that the person in the photograph is a teacher, a baby sitter, and a flight attendant. Hypothesis 4 predicted that female targets were considered more suitable for feminine jobs. This assumption was confirmed only for low status jobs (baby sitter, flight assistant). The effect of target gender on the likelihood to be a teacher was contrary to what predicted: participants considered men more suitable than women (see Table 4 for descriptive statistics).

As predicted by hypothesis 6 the objectified women ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 1.56$ ) were considered more suitable for flight assistant job (low-status) than non-objectified women ( $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = 1.67$ ),  $F(1,124) = 24.84$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Figure 2). On the contrary hypothesis 6 was not confirmed for the other low-status feminine job (baby sitter). Neither main nor interactive effects were found.

Finally, we found an unexpected interaction effect on the probability to be a teacher (see Figure 3).

In this case objectification had a negative effect on men and not on women. Objectified men ( $M = 3.87$ ;  $SD = 1.66$ ) were considered less likely to be teacher than non-objectified men ( $M = 4.52$ ;  $SD = 1.69$ ),  $F(1,126) = 4.70$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

The hypotheses we set were only partially confirmed. Concerning the evaluation of competence, the target's gender plays a key role, being males considered more competent than females. Contrary to our predictions, objectification does not seem to reduce the perception of women's competence. This is in contrast with previous findings (Heflick et al., 2011; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Loughnan et al., 2010) and future research is needed to understand the contrary nature of our results. A preliminary consideration may be related to the different methodologies used in such studies. Indeed, Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) used two female famous targets (i.e. Sarah Palin and Angelina Jolie), whereas in the present research both sexes were included and targets were common people. In the other studies, when both men and women were included, competence was assessed differently. It was asked to evaluate the competence of a specific worker (weather forecaster in the study by Heflick et al., 2011, and lawyer, manager, stockbroker, and scientist in the study by Loughnan et al., 2010) whereas in our study the job of the target was unknown. It is possible that in such studies the perception of competence was influenced by gender stereotypes as well as by job related stereotypes. In fact, when we considered specific professions, objectification had a significant effect in interaction with target gender (i.e. entrepreneur, teacher, and flight assistant).

Along with gender, objectification is determinant to evaluate workers' pay. If it is well established that the gender wage gap harms women, new findings have been obtained about the role played by objectification. Our results demonstrated that objectified individuals are attributed higher earnings than non-objectified ones. We can argue that focusing on one's appearance - as in the objectified condition - can produce some consequence similar to those of attractiveness, although attractiveness and objectification are two distinct aspects. Research has demonstrated the effect of body appearance on pay (Judge & Cable, 2011). Then it is not surprising that objectification, driving the attention to the body, affects the evaluation of a person's income.

About the effect of gender on the evaluation of workers as suitable for specific jobs, globally our findings are in line with the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983; 2001). The only exceptions are represented by the high-status feminine professions: even though the pretest and previous studies (e.g. Teig & Susskind, 2008) showed that both the psychologist and the teacher are perceived as feminine occupations, present results reveal that teaching is perceived as a male profession, whereas gender has no effect on the job of psychologist. It seems that high-status jobs are considered suitable for men even if typical of the opposite gender.

Objectification had different impacts on high- and low-status jobs. Concerning low-status jobs, both in the case of a masculine occupation, i.e. the plumber, and in the case of a feminine occupation, i.e. the flight attendant, objectified subjects are considered more suitable. Thus, objectification increases the suitability for low-status jobs. In the case of flight assistant this effect is stronger for females. The objectified woman is viewed as compatible for lower-status, service-oriented professions, in which women are supposed to cater to men, and for which a nice appearance may be a part of the image associated with the job (Glick et al., 2005). In fact, in the case of the other feminine low-status job we considered, i.e. the baby sitter, objectification has no effect probably because it is not a profession aimed at catering to adults, and physical attractiveness is not “required”.

The effect of objectification on suitability of men for a low-status job, i.e. the plumber, was not expected. Indeed, nice appearance is not associated with such profession. However, it is possible that in this case objectification emphasizes physical strength and fitness, that are necessary for the plumber.

For high-status jobs, the effect of objectification interacts with gender and it is opposite for men and women. Objectification increases women’s fit for a masculine job (entrepreneur), but decreases men’s fit for a feminine occupation (teacher). The fact that objectification could be a benefit for women is explicable as an effect of a social norm. It is well known that human culture values attractiveness more in females than in males (Avsec, 2006; Langlois, Kalakanis, Rubenstein,

Larson, Hallam, & Smoot, 2000). This implies that females experience more differential judgment and treatment based on attractiveness than males (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Jackson, 1992; Zebrowitz, 1997). Objectification, focusing the attention on the body, could emphasize these mechanisms. Indeed, consistently with this aspect, participants attributed higher income (typical of high-status jobs) to objectified targets.

On the contrary, for men competence is more important and objectification can be a handicap. This is in line with Loughnan et al.'s (2010) findings: the objectified male targets are attributed fewer mental states, less experience, and less moral patiency, features requested for high-status jobs.

To sum up, the present study extends the evidence on the consequences of objectification of others.

In particular, it underlines the effects of objectification on the evaluation of male and female workers, in high- and in low- status jobs. As seen, both men and women are susceptible to the damaging consequences of objectification, but in different ways. This can have important practical implications for men and women who aspire to hold specific jobs. If significantly altering one's physical attractiveness is difficult, emphasize or deemphasize the physical appearance is easier.

Thus, driving the attention to appearance can be useful for specific professions, but detrimental for others, and this varies in relation to gender.

Present study has some limitation and raises questions that are more than worthy of investigation by further research. The first limitation is that our research did not take into account the role of attractiveness. Future studies should investigate the link between objectification and attractiveness. Although literature has widely investigated the favourable effects attractiveness has on numerous aspects, it should be explored the role objectification plays on attractiveness, for both women and men.

Moreover, more attention should be deserved to specific professions. Although in our study we considered the effects of objectification in reference to both high- and low- status, and masculine and feminine jobs, it goes without saying that the professions we chose represent only very few occupations among the most frequent jobs. For example, since literature showed that there are more

high-status masculine than feminine occupations (i.e. Parker, Chan, & Saper, 1989; Teig & Susskind, 2008), and our results reveal that even typical female high-status jobs (i.e. teacher) can be perceived as masculine, it should be interesting investigating the effects of women's objectification on the suitability for prestigious occupations. This perspective could be a promising contribution to literature on gender roles and sex discrimination in leadership contexts (e.g. Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; De Piccoli & Rollero, 2010).

In conclusion, we have seen that objectification can also have some positive effect in the occupational domain. Nevertheless, on the grounds of the already cited negative psychological outcomes of objectification (Miner-Rubino, Twenge, & Fredrickson, 2002; Rollero, in press; Tiggeman & Kuring, 2004; Moradi & Huang, 2008), we can just blame a culture that makes desirable the self-objectification to increase accessibility to high status positions. Research on objectification is only a starting point to change it.

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Figures

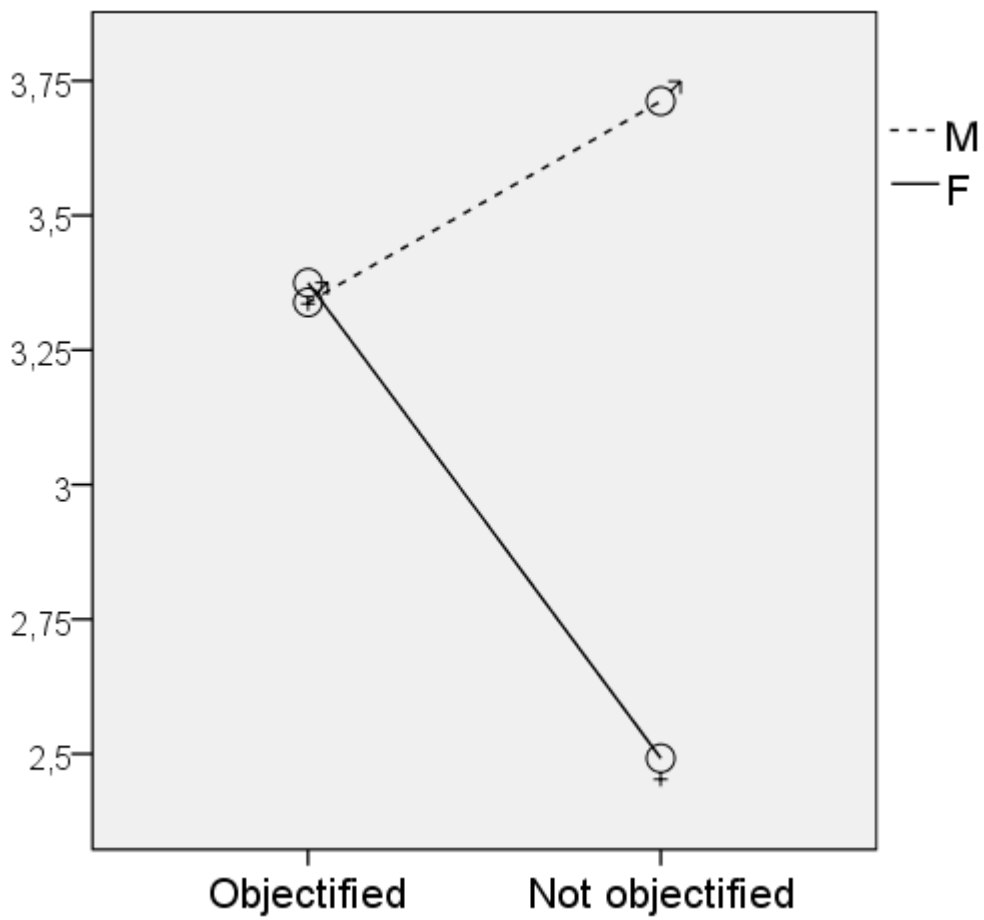
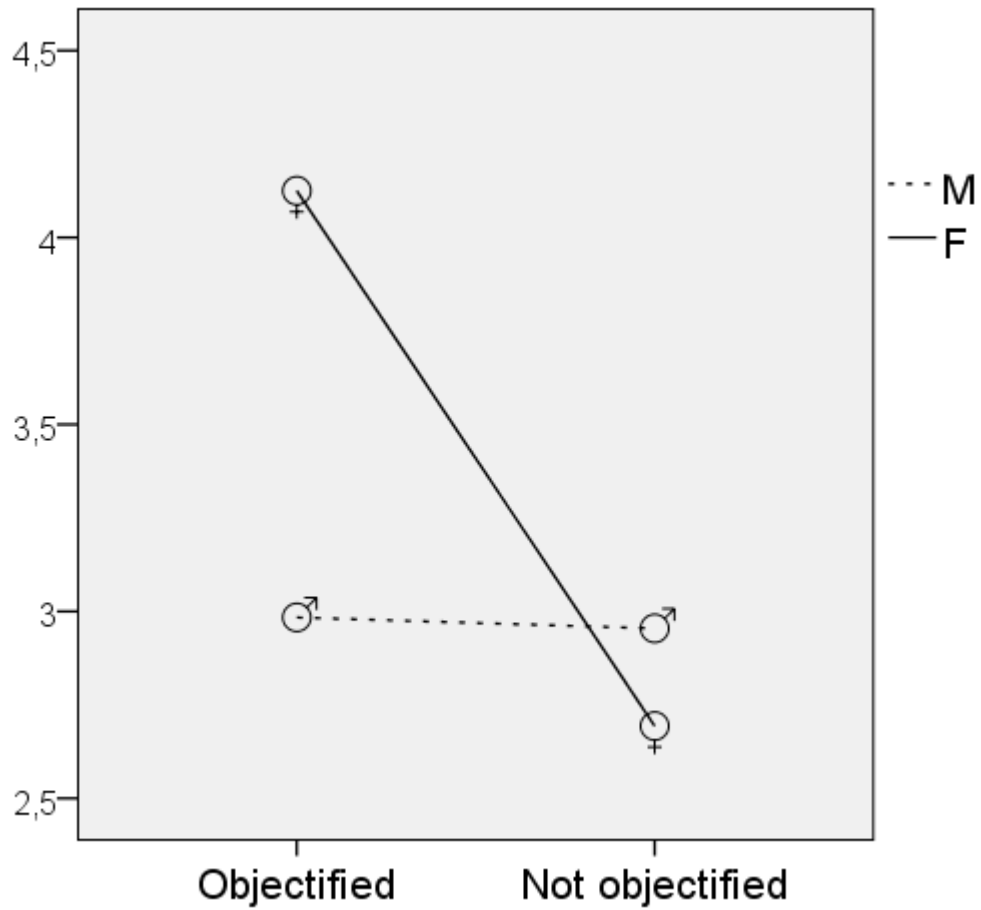
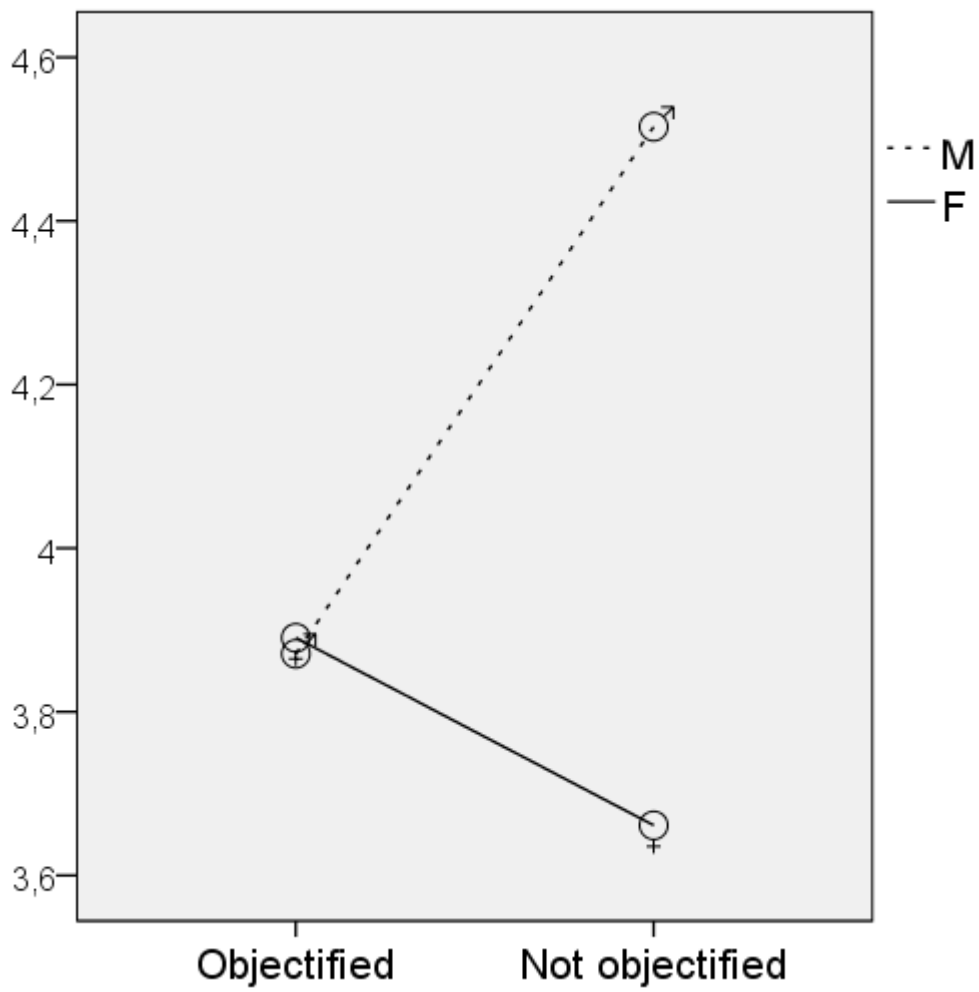


Figure 1. Interaction of objectification and target gender: Likelihood that target person is an entrepreneur mean scores.



*Figure 2.* Interaction of objectification and target gender: Likelihood that target person is a flight assistant mean scores.



*Figure 3.* Interaction of objectification and target gender: Likelihood that target person is a teacher mean scores.

Table 1. Typical Masculine Jobs: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

<i>Dependent variable</i>	Source	Type III sum of squares	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Engineer</i>	Target Gender	178.91	65.53	.00
	Objectification	.49	.18	.67
	Target Gender*Objectification	4.61	1.69	.20
<i>Entrepreneur</i>	Target Gender	22.15	7.73	.01
	Objectification	4.11	1.43	.23
	Target Gender*Objectification	24.95	8.70	.00
<i>Plumber</i>	Target Gender	22.62	18.28	.00
	Objectification	9.50	7.67	.01
	Target Gender*Objectification	3.77	3.05	.08
<i>Fireman</i>	Target Gender	37.68	28.29	.00
	Objectification	2.47	1.85	.18
	Target Gender*Objectification	1.45	1.09	.30

Table 2. Likelihood that male and female targets had masculine jobs: means and standard deviations

	Male target		Female target	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Engineer	4.90	1.66	3.21	1.65
Entrepreneur	3.53	1.73	2.94	1.71
Plumber	2.08	1.33	1.49	.89
Fireman	2.32	1.32	1.56	.97



Table 3. Typical Feminine Jobs: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

<i>Dependent variable</i>	Source	Type III sum of squares	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Psychologist</i>				
	Target Gender	7.43	2.49	.12
	Objectification	2.70	.91	.34
	Target Gender*Objectification	1.11	.37	.54
<i>Teacher</i>				
	Target Gender	11.04	4.09	.04
	Objectification	2.73	1.01	.32
	Target Gender*Objectification	12.11	4.48	.04
<i>Baby sitter</i>				
	Target Gender	225.75	93.74	.00
	Objectification	.26	.11	.74
	Target Gender*Objectification	.41	.17	.68
<i>Flight attendant</i>				
	Target Gender	12.29	4.83	.03
	Objectification	33.85	13.31	.00
	Target Gender*Objectification	31.19	12.26	.00

Table 4. Likelihood that male and female targets had feminine jobs: means and standard deviations

	Male target		Female target	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teacher	4.20	1.70	3.78	1.60
Psychologist	3.81	1.70	4.15	1.75
Baby sitter	2.35	1.53	4.24	1.56
Flight attendant	2.97	1.57	3.42	1.76